

Theodore Parker Church
Playing at What We Want to Be
June 13, 2021

OPENING WORDS **We All Are Playing** *Rev. Scott Tayler*

We all are playing.
Playing it up, playing it down, trying to play fair.
Playing for keeps, playing favorites, playing it safe,
sometimes too safe.
He plays hardball; They're playing house; I'm playing it by ear,
or at least learning to play it by ear.
She's tired of playing second fiddle; He's playing right into their hands.
Please God, can't we all just throw out the playbook and start again?
Sometimes we're just played out; it's not always bad to play possum.
And what about playing with fire?
Let's hope so friends.
Don't you want to feel again that burning within,
and let it loose?
In this moment, may it begin...

Exploring Who We Are By [Melanie Davis](#)

Under the right circumstances, playing with fire is a delight—imagine being gathered round a firepit as the crackling flames invite us to sing, dance, and roast a marshmallow or two.

Our chalice also invites us to play, although with ideas rather than with marshmallows. The flame encourages us to explore who we are, who our neighbors are, and where we are on our spiritual journeys.

Today, we light this chalice in the spirit of play. Let us trust the light to guide us in this hour and in the days to come, finding joy along the way.

READING *from Susan Nienaber, Congregational Consulting Group*
<https://www.congregationalconsulting.org/from-languishing-to-flourishing/>

As more folks get vaccinated and COVID restrictions end, we all long for a return to normalcy. Still, leading congregations is hard work and may get harder as we pivot once again in response to changing circumstances. Some people and some congregations struggle even as good news comes. Part of our ministry will be to help each other move from languishing to flourishing.

A week ago, I visited a congregation that was very vital going into the pandemic. Attendance was growing, giving was strong, and new members were regularly joining. The place was flush with young families and children. This church has remained strong throughout the past 15 months—finances are still in great shape, folks have worked together well to adapt to new technologies and ways of being church. But as I was about to walk out to my car, (a congregant) said, “Now all we need is to get back to normal and get everybody back.”

While I’m optimistic about this church’s recovery. I have a feeling that even for this congregation, things are going to look different moving forward. I couldn’t help but wonder who (we) might (be inclined to) blame if things don’t return exactly to the way they were in 2019. . .

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Let us gather as we can for this moment in time together: this moment, and this, and this, moments in which to breathe and wonder.

Dear life . . . what a sigh we feel coming from deep inside us. What a year it has been. More than that, to be honest.

And, really? You expect us to play together when we’re so weary. We’re so very weary. Going into this summer season, might we not simply rest?

For a bit, yes. For a small bit.

And then, back at it, remembering that our movement together is best forward, and we are not alone.

Dear spirit, remind us that even in our fatigue, in our wondering, our uncertainty, our confusion, our sadness, our frustration, our anger, even in our despair . . . we are not alone. And

so we cannot rest indefinitely. Someone needs us to be their helper. And we need someone to be ours.

In the quiet of this time, let us imagine . . .

MEDITATION MUSIC 18 What wondrous love is this . . .

What wondrous love is this, Oh my soul, Oh my soul,

What wondrous love is this, Oh my soul.

What wondrous love is this that brings my heart such bliss

And takes away the pain of my soul, of my soul

That takes away the pain, oh my soul.

HOMILY the Rev. Anne Bancroft

Six years ago, near the end of my first year of ministry with you, I offered this prayer during a service about lifelong learning:

May we find here a place of healing, to mend the broken threads of our being. May we find here a place of inspiration, to fill our grey days with rainbow rays of color and light, inspired by this world and each other. May we find here a place of resolve, to become the people we think we can be and know we want to be.

During that service, we had heard from several of our youth who had spent the year discerning their thoughts about religion, and life, and had taken the time to share their thoughts with us. What a gift! "It never ceases to amaze me," I commented, "that you - our children - come forward and share with us your stretching, your imagining, and yet we too seldom require that of ourselves as adults!"

Even, of course, as we - all of us, of whatever age - continue to spend a fair amount of time trying to know ourselves . . . it takes a lifetime, don't you think? And while we are figuring out who we are and why, we are simultaneously trying to imagine who we want to be, or - like our story this morning - what we want to be.

Do you remember the words of the artist, Pablo Casals?

Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that never was before and never will be again. And what do we teach our children in school? We teach them that two and two make four and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we teach them what they are? We should say to them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are

unique. In all of the world there is no other child exactly like you. . . . You must work---we must all work to make this world worthy of its children.

In fact, my friends, we must work to make this world worthy of all of us. Or play to make it so, as the case may be.

The actor and activist, Tim Robbins, suggests “Humanity has advanced, when it has advanced, not because it has been sober, responsible, and cautious, but because it has been playful, rebellious, and immature.”

Well, I don't know about the immature part, but I'm certain that playful has had something to do with it. Playful pushes us outside the box of our serious being. Maybe that's what Robbins meant by immature. Playful reminds us of more than two plus two makes four or that Paris is the capital of France. I wonder if playful would remind you that you are a marvel, that you are unique, that in all the world, there is no one exactly like you.

We need that. We so need to be reminded. We so need to get out of our serious boxes and remember what marvels we are and how unique.

I had a Zoom call this past Friday with around 40 classmates from high school - it was supposed to be our 45th reunion but because of Covid it was actually our 46th, and on Zoom anyway. I offered a prayer for those of our classmates who are no longer living - at the end of which one of the guys on the call - who I have not seen in all those 46 years - said, Anne, you look exactly the same. (well, except for the hair color, he pointed out.)

And, it's true there were many of us who didn't look so very different - so it is hard to fathom these years as having passed, but I can tell you we ARE all changed if only by what we have left in our childhoods and youth - that sense that used to come more easily, at least, of lightness, of playfulness, of abandon. We grew up . . . more or less. Had we lost our play?

I have mentioned to a number of you an article that I found years ago suggesting that we think of ourselves as being the age when we imagine we grew up, that point in time when - looking back - we thought of ourselves as independent adults.

When was that for you? And do you still see yourself, in your mind's eye, at that point in time? Think back - where were you? What were you doing?

I remember so clearly calling home when I was in college. I was in a phone booth - remember them? - on the campus where I went to college, calling my parents in Honolulu. I'm guessing it was collect, too - remember that? I was going to be leaving to study abroad shortly, and I wanted to give them the phone number of the place where I would be staying until I left, with my boyfriend, as it turns out. My mother insisted I would be better off staying with my brother, who - by the way - was living with his girlfriend in New Haven. I didn't see the difference between his situation and mine. "Well," she said, "I don't need to apologize for my double-standards." Indeed, no. And it was like turning a corner. She had become a person, not just my mom. And I was launched.

And, you? Do you have a memory of a similar time, or turn?

I asked a group of elders to think together on this idea and share it with me, and one woman - who was easily in her upper 80's, told me she knew exactly what I meant. For her, it was the day she went grocery shopping, after years of frugal living, and was able to buy a pot roast. Then, she said, then - when she could afford what seemed like a luxury for herself and her family - she felt she had arrived into adulthood.

And the question is then, how have we moved forward from there?

This strange year has made us reflective in so many ways. And, we long to get back to what we imagine was "normal" life, right? We hold memories of different times as though they represent "the way life should be," when it is perhaps more true that those moments, those times - whether it's our entry into adulthood, or our vision of time that felt manageable in its familiarity - those memories are springboards from which we move forward, and from which we never stop evolving, hopefully.

This time, also, is a springboard from which we will launch into a new way of being. HOW we do it will make all the difference, the same way HOW we have moved forward before has done. And the playful part is really important so that we don't get caught pointing fingers or looking for someone or some ones to hold accountable for our discomfort.

Moving into a new way of being - just like the times when we knew we were on our own in a different way, responsible for our own decisions, our own well-being - can be awkward and strange. Imagine a new horse trying to put its feet under itself for the first time . . .

But that sense of capacity, that sense of willingness to go forward boldly, and playfully, knowing, knowing we are marvels and unique and full of imagination even when two plus two is four and Paris is still the capital of France - that sense is irreplaceable.

You helpers, all of you helpers, have the capacity to move through this new strange time together, still figuring out who you are now, who and what you want to become. It will not be the same, no matter what. It never is, but we are, and we know it, even at a distance, all in this together.

Amen?

And as we move forward let us sing a pledge of movement - and so as to be inclusive acknowledge that one more step is not literal - but collective and joyful.

CLOSING HYMN 168 One More Step

One more step, we will take one more step
'Til there is peace for us and everyone, we'll take one more step.

One more word, we will say one more word
Til every word is heard by everyone, we'll say one more word

One more prayer, we will say one more prayer
Til every prayer is shared by everyone, we'll say one more prayer

One more song, we will sing one more song
Til every song is sung by everyone, we'll sing one more song.

One more step, we will take one more step
Til there is peace for us and everyone, we'll take one more step.

BENEDICTION

May we find here a place of healing, to mend the broken threads of our being. May we find here a place of inspiration, to fill our grey days with rainbow rays of color and light, inspired by this world and each other. May we find here a place of resolve, to become the people we think we can be and know we want to be.

Go in peace to love and save the world!

